

"Ivy Hall"

HABS-NJ-360

House of Cornelius Low

River Road, Raritan Landing

Piscataway Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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House of Cornelius Low
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Piscataway Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey

Owner: Mrs. E. B. Voorhees

Date of Erection: 1740-1

Architect:

Builder: Cornelius Low

Present Condition: Very good

Number of Stories: Two and attic

Materials of Construction: Foundation - stone

Exterior walls - local
sandstone

Interior walls - plaster
with some paneling

Inside brick chimneys

Roof - hip with dormers
recently added, slate

Historical Data:

This house was built by Cornelius Low on River Road, Raritan Landing in 1740-1. Raritan Landing was once a flourishing settlement about a mile above New Brunswick; as a matter of fact, at the time the house was built the Landing was a rival of New Brunswick

as a market for grain and other produce which were hauled from the interior and shipped down the Raritan to Amboy, Elizabeth Port, New York, and also to foreign ports. There was a bridge at the Landing which was completed in 1776, five years before there was a bridge at New Brunswick. There were docks, warehouses, and mills along the river in those days. They were mostly on the Middlesex County side of the river. It was from 1740 until shortly after 1800 that Raritan Landing flourished.

One of the pioneers of the development of the settlement was Cornelius Low who came in 1730 and built warehouses along River Road and a home on the flats near the wharf. Cornelius Low was of the third generation of the family having the name in America. The first member of the family came from Holstein and settled in Esopus in 1659. A son of this first settler moved to New York where he became a prominent merchant. Cornelius was born in 1700 and was one of a family of fifteen children. A year before he moved to Raritan Landing he married Johanna Gouverneur, a daughter of Isaac Gouverneur of Second River, a prominent merchant of New York. Ten years after his removal he was able to erect what was one of the finest houses in the province and probably the costliest house in East Jersey in 1741. Low was a surveyor, acted as a conveyancer, and was a prominent merchant and forwarder.

Warned by a freshet in 1739 he bought two acres on the bluff above his warehouse and built the present structure. In the fall of 1741, Cornelius Low and his family moved into the house. When the war broke out old Cornelius Low found himself faced with serious difficulties. His sons, Isaac and Nicholas, were merchants in New York - the former was a loyalist and the latter a patriot. Cornelius

did not live long, however, after the hostilities started; he died in April, 1777 while the British were still in possession of New Brunswick. From December 2, 1776 to June 22, 1777 the British were in full possession of the Landing. Tradition has it that Cornwallis made his headquarters in the Low house; this may not be so since it was an exposed outpost. It was the headquarters of the Post Commander while the British were in New Brunswick. We know a battle took place near the Low Mansion on April 12, 1777. The British advanced against General Lincoln at Bound Brook; the Continentals counter-attacked at the Landing on the return of the British.

Sixteen years after Cornelius Low's death, Nicholas found a purchaser in the person of John Poole, Jr. Poole was a member of the Field family of Bound Brook which family had become interested in the property at the Landing. John Poole and his wife Mary Voorhees made their home here for many years; as a matter of fact, Poole lived here until he died in 1833. At the time Poole bought the house there was also a warehouse about two hundred feet long along the River Road under the bluff where the mansion stood. Poole's youngest son, John Adams Poole, spent practically all of his life in the mansion, living there until his death in 1869. He was a doctor who, however, having independent means did not practice a great deal.

Shortly after the year 1800 business at the Landing increased under the guidance of John Poole. Before new methods of transportation were devised, it was not unusual to see teams standing for a full mile up River Road waiting to be unloaded. Four hundred tons of merchandise must have been received for shipment on some days. With the growth of New Brunswick the Landing declined. When the canal was put in operation trade at Upper Landing fell off and almost ceased when the railroad was built to Somerville.

After the death of Dr. Poole in 1869, the property was purchased by George W. Metlar. It had several occupants until 1916 when Mrs. Anna Voorhees purchased the property.

The main portion of the house was forty feet by fifty feet with a two story wing of stone about thirty feet square, and a frame addition in the rear which was built before 1800. Both the stone wing and the frame addition were removed sometime after 1871 during the ownership of George Metlar. The stone for the walls was hauled from the Van Horn and Reade quarries at Chimney Rock. It is estimated that more than three hundred and fifty tons of stone were needed. The house is Georgian. A wide hall traverses the house on the first floor. In this hall is to be found mahogany wainscoting and likewise mahogany paneling on the stairway balustrade height extending to the second floor. Two large rooms open off on either side of the hall. They have hand-hewn doors, beautiful panels and mantels. The mantels ~~are decorated~~ with fluted columns and Ionic caps. The living room has fluted pilasters on each side of the mantel between it and the cupboards. The cupboards are of a shell-top carved type with butterfly shelves. In two of the fireplaces on the second floor the old Dutch blue scenic tiles are still to be found, and in the rear of the house a few of the old twelve pane window-sashes remain.

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